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~~SENSITIVE~~

TS# 185848
Cyr# 3 of 9.

29 April 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Comment on Mr. McCone's Vietnam Views, of 28 April 1965

1. I agree with Mr. McCone's argument that the courses of action recommended in the Secretary of Defense's memorandum (of 21 April) are not likely, by themselves, to gain us our present objectives.

a. Our limited bombing of the North and our present ground force build-up in the South are not likely to exert sufficient pressure on the enemy to cause him to meet our present terms.

b. I concur in the CIA-DIA-State view of 21 April* that the large-scale introduction of US ground forces will not initially cause the enemy to back off.

c. I also concur in the recent intelligence warnings that the VC may seek some dramatic local victories in South Vietnam (e.g., investment of Da Nang and/or Kontum) in the near future -- that is, before the US can accomplish a large ground force build-up.

* (Attached) Memorandum (Revised Text), distributed at the NSC meeting of 22 April, which discusses Communist and world reactions to the Secretary of Defense's recommended course.

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d. The envisaged US ground force holding operation will buy time for the Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam (ARVN), but it will also give the enemy time to improve his capabilities -- including the infiltration of more units of the "People's Army of North Vietnam" (PAVN). It is of course possible that the greater US/Government of South Vietnam (GVN) military effort on the ground will in time prove overwhelmingly discouraging to the enemy. At the same time, if our air attacks against the North are confined within the limits recommended in the Secretary of Defense's memorandum, we will in effect be pressing the conflict on the ground where our capabilities enjoy the least comparative advantage. In these circumstances -- and given the enemy's known resolve and skill concerning attrition tactics over the long-term -- I am concerned that we will find ourselves pinned down, with little choice left among possible subsequent courses of action: i.e., disengagement at very high cost, or broadening the conflict in quantum jumps.

e. In the event that, instead, the US/GVN effort should begin to wear down the Viet Cong (VC), I share the 21 April memo's judgment that the chances would be somewhat better than even that the "Democratic Republic of North Vietnam" (DRV) would seek at least a temporary political solution, rather than launch a major ground invasion.

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2. I feel that Mr. McCone's recommended course of greater air action against the DRV would entail the following:

a. The DRV is, in my view, unlikely to engage in meaningful discussions at any time in coming months until US air attacks have begun to damage or destroy its principal economic and military targets. I thus concur with the USIB's judgment of 18 February 1965 that, given such US punishment, the enemy would be "somewhat more likely" to decide to make some effort to secure a respite, rather than to intensify the struggle further and accept the consequent risks.*

b. Insofar as possible, we should try to manage any program of expanded bombings in ways which (1) would leave the DRV an opportunity to explore negotiations without complete loss of face, (2) would not preclude any Soviet pressures on Hanoi to keep the war from expanding, and (3) would not suddenly produce extreme world pressures against us. Specifically, it would probably be advantageous to expand bombings after, not before, some major new VC move (e.g., obvious concentration for imminent attack on Da Nang or Kontum) and after, not before, any

* SHIE 10-3/1-65: "Communist Reactions to Possible US Courses of Action against North Vietnam" (and State dissent).

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current possibilities of serious negotiations have been fully tested. And such bombings should not be so regular as to leave no interval for the Communists to make concessions with some grace.

3. In our preoccupation with military action, we must of course not lose sight of the basically political aspect of the war. In the final analysis, it can only be won at the SVN hamlet level. This will thus entail certain measures over and above greater military commitment and expanded punishment of the DRV. The most imperative of these are:

a. Creating effective administrative, police, and local defense instrumentalities at the hamlet level.

b. Making US and GVN military measures support a growth of indigenous civilian political authority and serve legitimate local and national aspirations.

c. Expanding such political, economic, and sociological efforts as will close the gap between Saigon governments and the South Vietnamese population.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI

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This memorandum has been produced with the assistance and concurrence of officers of the Office of Current Intelligence (DDI) and of the Far East Division (DDP) who were present at this morning's meeting. This draft takes the form of a memorandum -- for your signature -- for the President.

SHERMAN KEET

29 April 1965

(DATE)